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JACOB EATON.

First Deacon of the Baptist Church in South Reading.

From life and on stone by T. Badger.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

IN SOUTH READING.

"This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created, shall praise the Lord."

BIBLE.

BOSTON:
PRESS OF J. HOWE, NO. 39, MERCHANTS ROW.
1841.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The Salem Baptist Association having passed a vote, requesting each Church composing that body to "prepare and forward to the Association its own history of rise and progress to the present time, to remain in the archives of the Association;" in August, 1840, this Church voted to comply with the request of the Association.

At a subsequent meeting, the Church having heard the following Historical Sketch, prepared by their direction, and believing it would be an interesting and useful manual in the hands of its members, voted to print the same by subscription.

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JAN 25 1944

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

We are not to despise the day of small things. There is a peculiar interest in tracing the feeble commencement of a religious community, when a few humble disciples, like a handful of speckled birds, surrounded by the more numerous and potent fowls of the air, having no bright prospects before them, and ready to exclaim, "by whom shall Jacob arise for he is small," then casting themselves at once on the arm of Omnipotence and cheerfully toiling on, amid obloquy, opposition and discouragement till their efforts are crowned with success, and their hearts filled with gratitude, thanksgiving and praise.

It may be proper to preface the narrative of the Baptist Church in South Reading, with a brief notice

of some members of our sentiments who lived in town before any church was formed here.

The first of our denomination known to have resided in this town, were three persons, who removed from Boston in 1775. They remained here about three years, in which time Elder Thomas Gair, Minister of the second Baptist Church in Boston, preached a lecture here, which was probably the first sermon delivered in this town by a Baptist.

In 1786 or 1787, a young man of this town was baptized and joined the Baptist Church in Menotomy, now West Cambridge, which, then, was the nearest church of our faith and order. About this time Elder Thomas Green of West Cambridge began to preach occasional lectures here.

In 1788 and 1789, two young men of this town were baptized and joined the Baptist Church in West Cambridge.

In 1789 there was an extensive revival of religion in the Congregational Church in the west part of Reading. Frequent meetings for conference and exhortation were held there, in which two brethren of the Baptist denomination, then residing in that place, took an active part. A number of young people from the South part of Reading (now South Reading) attended these meetings, and were so much interested in them, that in the autumn of this year, they resolved to commence such meetings in their own village.

Accordingly about twenty persons, male and female (all young except two or three) solemnly covenanted with God and each other to meet on the Lord's day evenings to worship that God who is a spirit, and seeketh such to worship him, as worship him in spirit and truth.

This we believe, was the first instance of such a use of the Lord's day evening in this place, and here

commenced that series of Lord's-day-evening exercises which has continued for more than half a century, and from which, perhaps, as much religious instruction has been obtained, and as much conviction of the reality of religion has emanated, as from all the other public exercises of that day.

These conference meetings served as a substitute for Sabbath schools and Bible classes, before the existence of these more modern institutions. At such meetings the thoughtful were assisted in their inquiries, and the thoughtless were often impressed with the worth of their souls, and the object of their existence in this world.

Here the simple experience, the earnest exhortation and the fervent prayer of the unlettered and humble follower of Jesus, tended to arrest the attention of gainsayers and persuade them that such persons were not the dupes of cunningly devised fables, but from the abundance of

their hearts, spoke forth the "words of truth and soberness."

While the unconverted are often disposed to parry off the force of the minister's addresses, by saying, or at least thinking "Oh, this is the *minister's* business. He gets his *living* by *preaching*"—they can make no such excuse to evade the exhortation of the private brother who has neither office, literature nor excellency of speech to obtain the pecuniary *reward* or win the *praise* of his hearers.

Though few of the young persons, who at first covenanted to keep up the Lord's day evening meetings, were at that time professors of religion, and many spoke lightly of the meetings, and predicted they would come to nought, yet they were continued and blest; for it is the plan of God to reveal himself to those who "follow on to know the Lord."

In 1790 two persons of this place were baptized and united with the

church in West Cambridge, and subsequently two other persons of our denomination moved into town.

In 1793, an evening meeting on Tuesday for prayer, singing and conference, was appointed and has continued, except that latterly it has been held on Wednesday evening.

Worldly people sometimes object to evening meetings for religious purposes, insinuating that more evil than good is likely to proceed from them. It is remarkable that such persons see no harm in, but are ready to commend and visit, evening meetings for merriment and hilarity, not to say dissipation and intemperance. "But Wisdom is justified of her children."

Toward the close of 1793, a Friday evening meeting, for those who trusted they had experienced the renewing grace of God, was appointed by about a dozen young men, who subscribed articles forming themselves into a society for religious improvement.

This meeting, except that it was attended by *brethren* only, resembled what is now known by the name of *young converts'* meeting; and such interviews are regarded by pious persons in after years, as a peculiarly interesting part of their Christian experience, distinguished by simplicity, sincerity, generosity and ardor of feeling; and indeed so regarded by the great Bridegroom of his people, who thus complains of the Ephesian Church, "I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy *first love.*"

In the winter of 1793, several members, of this young men's society felt an unusual desire for a revival of religion. One, whose heart was frequently going out in prayer for it while thus employed, would often make Lot's plea, "Is it not a little one and my soul shall live," without suspecting these words were found in Scripture.

In the spring of the year, 1794, three young men, members of the

above mentioned society,* after much meditation on the duty of making a public profession of religion, and much conversation with several Congregational clergymen on the nature and subjects of Christian baptism, were fully convinced, as they read the Bible, that nothing short of *immersion*, in water, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, was gospel baptism, and that believers in Christ, were alone entitled to this ordinance.

These young men therefore visited Elder Thomas Baldwin, Pastor of the second Baptist Church in Boston, related their Christian experience, and desired baptism of him. He, being unacquainted with, and desiring further knowledge of them, came to this place April 21, for that purpose, and preached from Phil. iii. 8; which was the first time Elder Baldwin was in this town. The 4th of

* Lilley Eaton, Jr. David Smith, Jr. and Jacob Eaton.

May was appointed for their baptism at Boston, and reception to the church under the care of Elder Baldwin. Accordingly they repaired to Boston on that day, but the water in the mill pond, where the ordinance was to be administered, was very unexpectedly found too low for this purpose. This circumstance led the candidates to desire Elder Baldwin to baptize them in Reading pond, to which he consented. As very gracious results followed this disappointment, it may not be impertinent here to explain what was unknown to them till several years after, namely, how the water in the mill pond, at North Boston, so suddenly subsided.

The miller, having a strong antipathy to the Baptists, and hearing that some tall young men from the country were to be baptized that day, absented himself from his meeting, and in time of divine service, drew off the water, that he might disappoint them. This fact was divulged

by the miller himself, when some years after, he took up his residence in Reading, and there, under peculiar circumstances, became a member of that sect which he had so greatly hated and despised. Thus God is able to make the wrath of man praise him and restrain the remainder thereof. "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord."

Such was then the prejudice and opposition toward a Baptist minister in this town, that personal violence was threatened Elder Baldwin, if he attempted to baptize any person here. But on Monday, May 12, Elder B. visited this place, and by his prudent and conciliatory deportment, with his solemn and affectionate address, did much toward silencing the abuse and commanding the attention and respect of his opponents. He preached from 1 John, iii. 14—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

At the water side the exercises were interesting and impressive.—Ten or twelve persons who afterwards made a profession of religion, dated their first abiding religious impressions from the services of that day. This was probably the first time the ordinance of immersion was administered in this water, and many of the spectators then present, had never before seen the ordinance performed; but since that time, this pond has so often been used for a baptizing place, that it has sometimes been styled "*Enon.*"

The connexion of Elder Baldwin with the infancy of the Baptist denomination in this town reminds us of the good providence of God, in raising up that distinguished preacher of the gospel of Christ.

Thomas Baldwin was a native of Connecticut. He lost his father when an infant. His mother was a woman of talent and piety, and to her faithful and affectionate instruction, her son was greatly indebted.

The early years of his ministry were spent in the rough regions of New Hampshire, where for years the whole of his salary did not average forty dollars a year; where his own hands ministered to his necessities and those of his family. As to his literature, he was self-taught. A man of great energy, patience and perseverance of character, who lived to be useful. He had a care not only for his own people, but for all the Baptist Churches in his vicinity. He labored abundantly in preaching and writing. He closed his life August 29, 1825, in the 72d year of his age, having been in the misistry 42 years. The day previous to his decease, he preached twice. His last sermon was from these words, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal. ii. 20. With peculiar emphasis he adopted the language of his text, and with great feeling read in conclusion the 71st Psalm,

"GOD of my childhood and my youth,
The guide of all my days,
I have declared thy heavenly truth,
And told thy wondrous ways.

"Wilt thou forsake my hoary hairs,
And leave my fainting heart;
Who shall sustain my sinking years,
If God, my strength, depart?

"Let me thy power and truth proclaim,
Before the rising age,
And leave a savour of thy name,
When I shall quit the stage.

"The land of silence and of death
Attends my next remove;
O, may these poor remains of breath,
Teach the wide world thy love."

His departure the day following, was almost a translation "that he should not see death;" for having led the evening devotions of the family where he was then visiting, and kindly shaken hands with each individual present, he retired to rest. In two hours after this, without a struggle, he breathed his last, and his happy spirit, doubtless, escaped to a mansion of endless rest and

felicity. His "praise was in all the churches," and especially in this, whose spiritual father in several respects he seemed to be.

During the summer of the year 1794, Br. John Peak, a young minister in whose conversion Elder Baldwin had been instrumental, repeatedly preached in this town, with good effect; and previous to the next winter, baptized seven persons in Reading pond. Elder Baldwin also baptized two of our young men at Boston, who united with the Church under his care. So that at the close of the year 1794, there were eighteen baptized persons in the south part of Reading, (now South Reading,) most of whom had united with the Woburn Baptist Church, under the care of Br. Peak.

During the years 1795, 1796, and 1797, conference and prayer meetings were kept up as before, with occasional lectures on week days, from Elders Baldwin, Lovel, E. and U. Smith.

In June, 1797, a society was formed consisting of those who fellowshipped each other as Christians, and were of the Baptist sentiments, to meet once a month ; which meetings were continued monthly, till this Society was constituted a Church, and are still continued. In 1798, this Society, for the first time, enjoyed the preaching of a Baptist minister on the first day of the week ; subsequently a fourth part of the time till 1800. Since that time, almost constantly.

On the first Lord's day in June, 1799, five persons were baptized in Reading Pond, which was the first time this ordinance was administered in this place on the Lord's day. At the close of this year, the number of baptized persons residing in town was twenty-two, twelve brothers and ten sisters, (all residing in what is now South Reading.) Several had previously removed from town.

In the spring of 1800, the Baptists here petitioned for liberty to meet

in the centre School-House, when they should have preaching and the School-House was not in use. This request being rejected, they thought it necessary to build a house for public worship. Their purpose was ridiculed by some, who said, "*nineteen boys* are going to build a MEETING-HOUSE." Such felt as the enemies of the Hebrews when they were about to re-build the walls and the temple of Jerusalem, and who contemptuously said of their enterprize, "What do these feeble Jews?—if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."

But on the 14th day of May, this year, the raising of the frame of the Baptist House of worship, was commenced with prayer, and closed with praise. The building was 38 feet by 34, with galleries.

"THESE walls we to God's worship raise,
Long may they echo with his praise;
And He descending, fill the place
With choicest tokens of his grace.

"Here let the great Redeemer reign
With all the graces of his train;
While power divine his word attends,
To conquer foes and cheer his friends.

"And in the great decisive day,
When God the nations shall survey,
May it before the world appear,
That crowds were born to glory here."

In June, a young man* from Andover, who came to work on this house, while witnessing the administration of baptism in Reading Pond, was deeply impressed with a view of his character as a sinner, and his need of cleansing grace. The month following, when the first meeting was held in the new house of worship, this young man was baptized in that same water, rejoicing in the salvation of God.

On this we remark, that it may seem some evidence that immersion is the true apostolic baptism, from the circumstance, that it has so often been blest to the awakening of irre-

* Mr. Gideon Foster.

ligious persons. Surely the Lord knew how to fit his ordinances to be means of grace. We may also admire the providence of Him, who "seeth the end from the beginning," in calling this young man from a neighboring town to work on this house, and then calling him by his grace to work in a holier vocation. This worthy brother has been for several years Deacon of the First Baptist Church in Charlestown, and both in public and private life, as a citizen and a Christian, he has honored his profession and been eminently useful. His conversion was made the means of awakening a number of persons in this place. Thus the Lord early blest him and made him a blessing.

After our house was finished, it was opened for public worship, October 22, on which occasion Elder Baldwin preached from 2 Chron. vi. 41, "Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou and the ark of thy strength; let thy

priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness." Lord's day, Nov. 16, the Baptists attended the ordinance of the Lord's Supper in their house of worship, for the first time in this town. This was a precious privilege to them, for which their hearts went out in gratitude and praisc.

This day the Boston miller before mentioned, having taken up his residence in this town, left his house to attend the Congregational meeting. On the way he felt impressed to turn up to the Baptist meeting, though the place and people he heartily despised. He labored hard to suppress this unaccountable impression on his mind; but seemed at length compelled to yield to it. Still, to save the disgrace of being *seen* going to such a meeting, he passed to it over the fields. The struggle of his feelings had so long detained him, that as he stepped on the threshhold of the house, the preacher was just announcing his text, in these words,

Acts xxvi. 18, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." These words seemed to be spoken directly into his heart. His eyes were opened to see his lost condition as a sinner. He felt the most guilty of mortals, and ready to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" Before the exercises were closed, a passage of Scripture quoted, gave relief to his mind. He felt turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. He left the house another man from what he entered it. He returned to his own house, but avoided telling his wife of his change of feelings, knowing her aversion to the Baptists, and the impetuosity of her temper. She however saw from his countenance, that something had happened to him, and inquired what. He evaded an answer. She learned

from one of her children, that its father had been seen going to the *Baptist meeting* that day, which the poor woman thought such a stain on their family as many waters could not bleach. Her rage and resentment scarcely knew bounds.

One of the brethren,* who was baptized the year before, and who began and continued to make it his great business to help his neighbors get to heaven, noticed this miller in meeting, and thought him anxious for his spiritual interests. The Monday following, he made a friendly call at his house. He was not at home. His wife was asked where he had gone. She answered with great impatience, that she "did not know; and did not care if he never returned." The visiter left the house, and learning from one of the children in the yard, that his father took the axe and went toward the woodlot, he followed after him. But when he had

* Ephraim Emerson.

arrived at the woods, he could see no person, and hear no sound of an axe. He wandered among the trees, till at length his ear was arrested with the voice of prayer. He softly approached the spot whence it proceeded, where he saw the miller on his knees before the stump of a tree which he had felled, pouring out his prayer to Him who seeth in secret, that God would open the eyes of his wife, to see her condition as a sinner, renew her heart, and grant her repentance unto life. The suppliant seemed to have such earnestness, faith and fervor in his devotions, that the listener said within himself, that prayer is heard, and will be answered. He waited till the close of his petition, when both, seated on the trunk of the tree, held a most interesting converse and communion of hearts. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

At length, the visiter said to the miller, "come, let us go to your house, and see what the Lord is do-

ing there." They returned to the house and found the miller's wife in great distress, from reflecting on her treatment to her husband. She be gan to fear, that she had committed the unpardonable sin. After much anxiety of mind, she trusted she found pardon and comfort through the mercy of Christ. She and her husband were afterwards baptized, and added to the church. Five years after, she joyfully departed this life, in hope of a glorious immortality.

Thus we see that the Lord's ways are not as men's ways; nor his thoughts as their thoughts. Why should the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? He that sitteth in the heavens can most easily accomplish his purposes. He can touch a spring here or there, in the immense machinery of his providences and disappoint the deepest scheme of his adversaries; or, he can touch their hearts, and turn them as the rivers of water, whithersoever he will.

And here it may not be amiss, to farther notice the excellent brother who visited the miller. In a little more than a year after this, he removed to Harvard, where he became a most efficient member and deacon of the Baptist Church in that town. In 1817, he removed to Marietta, Ohio, where the next year he united with *four* others, in forming a Baptist Church in that city, which has since greatly increased in numbers and influence, and become one of the most flourishing vines in our Western regions. This brother, though slow of speech, and without very brilliant talents, was nevertheless able, by his friendly deportment, consistent life, and deep acquaintance with the Scripture, to do much in the service of his Redeemer. He died in 1834, near Marietta,* aged 67.

* About the year 1837, an Elder of a Presbyterian Church, near Marietta, having become convinced that he ought to be immersed, in imitation of the ancient saints, who were "buried with Christ by baptism," was thus baptized; on

In December, 1801, Elder Ebenezer Nelson, from Middleborough, commenced preaching to the Baptist people here. At the close of this year, the number of baptized persons, including those who had been baptized here, and those who had moved into town, amounted to forty.

which occasion, the Baptist minister of Marietta preached a sermon. This occurrence induced several members of said Presbyterian Church, to present an earnest request to their minister, Professor Jewett, of Marietta College, to preach a sermon against the sentiments of the Baptists, in order to prevent the *infection* of the seceding Elder from spreading. This the Professor undertook to do. And after a deep, prayerful, trying, and as he avers, most "*laborious and protracted search for truth*," he found himself conscientiously compelled to write a book in *favor* of the views of the Baptists. This work has recently been published, and from the erudition and standing of its author, and the candor and kindness of the spirit in which it is written, bids fair to do much towards terminating this unprofitable controvery, which has so long burdened the thoughts and consumed the time of those who see almost "eye to eye," and ought to be, heart and hand, very friends in promoting the cause of godliness.

In 1802, one of these, a sister, deceased. This was the first instance of the death of a Baptist in Reading, and the second known instance of the death of any Baptist who had ever resided in this town, including sixty persons, and embracing the time since 1775.

In October, 1803, there was a revival of religion in Malden. Several brethren, and others from Reading, visited Malden; and on their return seemed much impressed with the worth of souls, and the importance of religion.

October 27, Br. Thomas Paul, a Baptist minister of color, preached here from John xiv. 27. His sermon seemed blest to the quickening of professors, and some non-professors, who felt like the cleansed lepers, that they had not returned to give God the glory. One young man, on leaving the meeting, was so distressed on this point, that he promised the Lord, that if he would spare his life to another opportunity, he would

declare what he had done for his soul. Accordingly he did, and afterwards became a successful minister.

Br. Paul, though an unlettered man, and young as a preacher, appeared to speak with the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. In the earnestness of his address, and the fervor of his supplications, he seemed a second Whitefield. His manner was strikingly pathetic, and the tones of his voice, in his appeals to the unconverted, as he sometimes reiterated, "*sinner, sinner, sinner!*" were truly thrilling. Indeed he seemed commissioned, emphatically to "call sinners to repentance." In the evening, he preached from these words, "Say not ye there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." In this discourse he pointed out the error and danger of delay in a matter of such importance as the soul's salvation, with a

force and eloquence, that left not a hearer at liberty to be indifferent. And when, in an impassioned part of his sermon, he described the special power and presence of the Highest, as not only approaching, but actually AT THE DOOR, the interest and sensibility of the audience were intense. He seemed to enjoy a strong earnest of the work of the Lord in this place, which immediately followed, and which he almost predicted.

But it was not the manner or address of a new preacher that awakened extraordinary attention, for on the Saturday evening following, (October 29,) when several of the brethren, with a number of anxious persons met for prayer at a private house, there was a far more striking evidence of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Such was the solemnity of this Bethel, that some present were literally awe-struck. They acknowledged, that such a meeting they had never before witnessed. To use the emphatic lan-

guage of one who attended, "It seemed as though heaven and earth were coming together." The word of God, whether uttered in reading, exhortation or prayer, was "quick and powerful;" but especially the petitions that were offered seemed solemn as eternity, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and prevalent with Jehovah. That evening four or five persons were hopefully brought into the "glorious liberty of the children of God," so that the groans of the distressed, and the songs of the redeemed were literally mingled. It was a most melting season. The evening following was much like it; and for a time, daily, some were brought to rejoice in a Saviour they had never loved before.

The meetings in the ensuing week were of a most deeply interesting character. It was a pentecostal season, when transgressors were "pricked in their hearts," and seemed unable to avoid exclaiming aloud, "What must I do to be saved." Some were

too overwhelmed with a view of their condition as sinners, to remain upon their seats. One young man in particular, seemed in greater agony than though his limbs had been literally broken. In truth, his heart was broken within him; he saw but a step between him and endless death. Yet he was no more distracted than was Saul of Tarsus, when he fell to the ground, and trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This same young man was afterwards not only a sober, industrious, and useful citizen, but an active and devout Christian. He was a man of character and intelligence; and yet he was always ready, unhesitatingly, to avow his firm persuasion that nothing but the special power of God wrought upon his mind and physical frame in the extraordinary manner he manifested at that time. He lived the life, and died the death of the righteous; his last end was peace.

Unbelievers may cavil at such accounts; and what fact cannot be caviled at? but there are some objections and gainsayings, which are better met with the reply of Michael, the arch angel, "The Lord rebuke thee," than by a long argument.

True, Christ informs us that the devil sows tares among the wheat. Hence it is no uncommon thing in revivals of religion, for counterfeit Christians to appear. They are either self-deceived, or hypocritical deceivers. The enemies of vital piety make a great handle of such examples, and from these attempt to argue that all profession of religion is a pretence or deception. But such inferences are both unphilosophical and disingenuous. The very idea of *counterfeit*, supposes the existence of a *genuine;* and attempts at counterfeiting, imply a belief in the *value* of what is counterfeited; for though men counterfeit gold and silver money, they never counterfeit the stones of the street.

As in revivals of religion it is now common, as it was in the days of the apostles, for "some to mock," Br. Paul preached a sermon particularly addressed to this class, from Acts xiii. 41, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." In this sermon he showed the danger of trifling with the subject of religion, or lightly esteeming the operations of the Divine Spirit. That such conduct led to that persevering hardness and perverseness of the will which constituted the "sin against the Holy Ghost," which has "never forgiveness, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." Provoking God to give up such persons to their "strong delusions," to be "suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy."

November 1, five persons were baptized. At an evening meeting, November 3, an aged saint,* who

* Mr. Edward Burditt, Sen.

had some time before removed from Malden to this town, was present. This "father in Israel," Simeon like, with Christ in the arms of his faith, recommended the precious Saviour to his fellow men, and prayed that the Holy Spirit might lead them to embrace him in this the day of divine power. About two hours after leaving the house of worship, he dropped his earthly tabernacle, and like a shock of corn fully ripe, we trust, was gathered to the heavenly garner.

November 4, four persons were baptized; 13th, nine were baptized, two of them thirteen, and one* nine years of age. November 20, three were baptized; 27th, six were baptized, one twelve years of age. In

* Miss Eliza Green. She was the youngest person ever received into our Church; a daughter of Br. Jeremiah Green, the architect of the Meeting-house. It is but justice to say of Br. Green, that he greatly exerted himself to promote the interests of the Baptist denomination in this town.

the space of about two months, about forty persons in the south part of Reading, were hopefully converted to God. This was the most remarkable revival of religion that had ever been witnessed in this village. It spread to both religious Societies. No system of measures had been adopted to produce an excitement of the passions, and yet in different and remote parts of the village, there was an unusual thoughtfulness and solemnity on the minds of people who had attended none of the meetings above mentioned.

Numbers of veteran worldly men, who perhaps during their lives had never felt any particular interest about religion, seemed spontaneously to acknowledge that there must be a divine reality in religion; and that this work was evidently the finger of God.

CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH,

AND

MINISTRY OF ELDER NELSON, AS PASTOR.

At the close of the year 1803, there were 65 Baptist professors in town, 30 males, and 35 females. Up to this time the Baptists in this town, had not formed themselves into a regular Church, but were considered a branch of the Woburn Baptist Church, where many of them joined when they were baptized.

In January, 1804, these members requested a dismission from the Woburn Church, in order to constitute a regular Baptist Church in Reading. And for this purpose, a council of Elders and Brethren from the Baptist Church in Boston, in Beverly, in Malden and Woburn, was invited, and convened here January 31, 1804. This council examined the senti-

ments of the professors wishing to become a Church, voted unanimously their fellowship of them, and publicly recognized them as an organized Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The same day, Elder Ebenezer Nelson was invited to become Pastor of the Church, and accepted the invitation.

In 1804, this Church united with the Warren Association of Baptist Churches, and successively, with the Boston and the Salem Association of Churches.

In 1809, our Pastor baptized two persons in Andover, who were added to this Church. This we suppose was the first time this ordinance was administered in that town. From 1804 to 1815, there was a gradual accession to our number. Several persons from Lynnfield, Reading, and Andover, were baptized and added to the church.

Also members of the Congregational Church in this town, of that in the west part of Reading, of that

in the north part of Reading, and of that in Lynnfield, who had become convinced, that, according to the Scriptures, they ought to be immersed, on a profession of faith, left these several Congregational Churches, were baptized, and joined this church.*

In March, 1815, Elder Nelson, who had been preaching with us 13

* In various other towns, similar changes have taken place. In some instances Pastors of Congregational Churches, with large portions of their flock, have given up the sprinkling of infants, as unsupported by the Bible, and embraced immersion, on a profession of faith, as the only water baptism authorized by Christ and his apostles.

The present year, (1840,) several Congregational ministers in this vicinity have been immersed, and a number of Congregational Churches now have fonts prepared in their houses of worship, for the purpose of immersion.

A single Baptist minister in one of our States, has lately, within the space of four years, baptized over 200 persons, who had already been members of Pedo-baptist churches; and a Baptist minister in another State, has "buried with Christ in baptism," more than 400 persons of this class, of whom 40 were Pedo-baptist ministers.

years, requested a dismission from his pastoral relation to the church. The church requested him to continue longer with them, but as he was earnest in his wish, they gave him a dismission, and letter of recommendation, in which they say, "We do now recommend him to the Churches and all to whom this may come, as an able minister of the New Testament; one who hath been enabled to be in good measure faithful, a blessing to this Church and place, for whom we desire forever to bless the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls."

Elder Nelson was a man of sober and consistent deportment, of good natural powers of mind, and energy of character. He was a native of Middleborough, Mass. His grandparents were the first Baptists in the county of Plymouth. On leaving South Reading, he became Pastor of the Baptist Church in Malden, where he deceased, May, 1825, in the 72d year of his age, and 40th of his ministry.

About the time of Elder Nelson's dismission, some question having arisen between the Baptist Church and Society, respecting the equality of their rights in electing a minister, as members of each owned the Meeting-house in common, a committee from each met, and made a joint report, that in future "the Church nominate a man of their choice to supply the pulpit, and lay it before the Society for their concurrence, the Society not insisting on their equal right to the same. Also that the Church members meet with the Society at their meetings to act with them respecting the temporal support of the minister, taking care of their property, and other Society affairs."

This report was accepted, and this arrangement proved satisfactory. As the minister was supported by voluntary contributions, or subscriptions of the hearers, subsequently the Church became surety for the Society, guaranteeing their Pastor a spec-

ified salary, and when the Society subscription did not amount to this sum, they averaged the deficiency on the members of the Church, according to the town valuation of their property.

INTERIM.

In 1816, the Church voted to ordain to the "work of preaching the gospel and administering the special ordinances thereof," one of their number, Br. GEORGE EVANS, who had been by their approbation, engaged for several years as an Evangelist, in different parts of the country. Br. Evans preferring to receive ordination at Milford, in New Hampshire, where he was preaching, was subsequently ordained there. And from thence journeyed to the Western States, where he continued preaching for a number of years.

He has now been preaching for thirty years; has travelled many thousand miles in destitute parts of our land; has been instrumental in

the conversion of several young men who have become ministers, and has, we trust, been a faithful and successful laborer in the vineyard of our Lord.

This Church has since approbated six others of its members to the work of the ministry.

From Elder Nelson's dismission to 1817, the Church was supplied with preaching, by Brs. Colman,*

*The Church contemplated inviting Br. James Colman to become their Pastor, but he signified his intention of devoting himself to a missionary life.

We considered him a young man of excellent promise. "His talents were peculiarly adapted to a cultivated state of society. There was a brilliancy of imagination, and a fervor of eloquence in his discourses, which commanded the attention and awakened feelings of interest in all who heard him." But he felt it his duty to preach the glad tidings of salvation to *Pagans.*

He was born in Boston. In the eleventh year of his age, he became a member of the Baptist Church under the care of Elder Baldwin. He was approbated as a preacher when 21 years of age. In the 24th year of his age, he embarked as a missionrry to Burmah, where he arrived the year following.

Wheelock, Elton, and Elders Wilmarth, Ellis, Pitman, and others, who baptized six persons, who were added to the Church.

In 1817, a young brother, Lane, from Newburyport Baptist Church, preached here five months, and the Lord's work seemed revived among us. This year twelve persons were baptized, and added to the Church.

MINISTRY OF BR. DAVIS.

September 7th, 1817, the Church having heard Br. G. F. Davis preach one day, quite to their acceptance, and also having heard a good report of him, voted unanimously to invite him to preach statedly with us as our Pastor. He accordingly took up his residence with us in the spring of 1818.

After laboring about four years with great diligence, prudence and zeal, he died suddenly of a fever, amid prospects of great usefulness.

He breathed his last without a struggle or a groan, leaving behind him the character of a most amiable man, and devoted missionary of the everlasting Gospel.

Ministering brethren from the Baptist Churches in Salem, Danvers, Lynn and Woburn, met here, and publicly recognized him as Pastor of this Church.

This year a Lord's-day School and Bible Class for instructing the children and youth of members of the Church and Society was organized, agreeably to a vote of the Church. This was the first institution of the kind in this town, and we believe in this vicinity. Such schools have since been formed by various denominations, with manifest utility.

They were first formed through the efforts of Mr. Robert Raikes, at Gloucester, England, in 1782; and before the death of that benevolent man, in 1811, he had the satisfaction of seeing such schools for 300,000 children established throughout the British empire.

In 1818, the Church, after discussing at some length the question on the propriety of ordaining Deacons, voted to postpone the subject indefinitely.

In 1820, there was an interesting revival of religion here; thirty persons, chiefly from among the blooming youth, were baptized. Some who had been leaders in the circles of vanity, became truly serious and devout. One young man in particular, who from childhood had borne the palm for irreligion, and the very reverse of sober mindedness, was arrested in his downward course, renewed in the "spirit of his mind," and has since been distinguished for the unquestionable and persevering spirituality of his character.

Such instances deserve to be recorded to the honor of the power of regenerating grace, and as furnishing examples of the reality and efficacy of religion, confounding even to infidelity itself.

One of the converts in this revival, a young woman of estimable character, was so filled with "joy unspeakable and full of glory," that, week after week, she apparently could not contain herself. In her was literally

fulfilled the words of the Psalmist, (126 Psalm,) "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dreamed. *Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.*"

She continued in this happy frame of mind for several months after her baptism, when she joyfully departed this life, and we trust entered that blissful world where is fulness of joy and pleasure forever more.

"From such as walk in Wisdom's road,
Corroding fears are driven ;
They 're washed in Christ's atoning blood,
Enjoy communion with their God,
And find their way to heaven.

"There fragrant flowers immortal bloom,
And joys supreme are given,
There rays divine disperse all gloom ;
Beyond the confines of the tomb
Appears the light of heaven.

The Pastor of the Church speaking of this revival, remarks, that previous to its commencement, "there were 500 persons in the town under the age of twenty, and not one to a

hundred of them professed to have been changed from nature to grace; they were growing up in sin.

The prayers and exhortations of one of the school instructers* seemed much blessed to the religious awakening of his pupils. From the neighborhood of this school the good work spread over the town.

"Meetings for worship were holden in the morning, afternoon and evening of almost every day in the week, and were well attended."

As many as thirty persons in the town were hopeful subjects of renewing grace during this revival.

"Soon after the revival became powerful here, Malden was visited by special influences. About 100 were hopefully born again in that town, and in Saugus nearly as many more."

In referring to this revival six years after, Mr. Davis says, "As the fruits of that work, 36 were added

* Mr. Rankin, a Pedo-baptist brother.

to the Church under my pastoral care, and 31 to the Congregational Church. It has been objected to revivals of religion that the subjects of sudden change during such seasons of great excitement, are apt to fall away from their religious profession. As an answer to such an objection, and to the praise of divine grace, be it recorded, that but one of those added to us in that revival, has as yet by immorality of conduct, dishonored the Christian name, and *that one* has been mercifully reclaimed and restored to the bosom of the Church."

This year, (1820,) the Baptist Meeting-House was removed to a more eligible site in the centre of the village, and subsequently enlarged, by an addition of 16 feet to its length, making it 38 feet by 50; and a new porch, with a belfry was added.

In 1822, the eldest* of the three brethren, who were the first of the

* Lilley Eaton.

Church baptized in this town, died, in the 54th year of his age. He was sick but a few days, and during most of these, deprived of his reason. A few minutes before he died, he revived, and committed his soul to his Redeemer in a prayer, of which the following is an extract.

"I rejoice in the God of my salvation. Thou art the portion of my soul. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgression. O Lord, revive thy work in this place. May sinners be converted and fearfulness surprize the hypocrite. I commit myself, O Lord, into thy hands and all my numerous concerns, for time and eternity.—Amen."

These were his last words.

This was the last, the dying prayer,
Of him who made the Church his care;
Their joys and sorrows all he felt,
Which often made his heart to melt.

But now he's left this band of love,
To join the Church of Christ above;
Where, free from sin, he sings the grace
That brought him to that glorious place.

This brother, who from the first organization of this Church, had contributed most towards its pecuniary aid, was specially prospered by the Lord, in his worldly business; so that in him was fulfilled the promise, "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

This year, (1822,) the Church appointed a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer, on account of the drought and a sickness which prevailed among us, and which proved more mortal than any sickness known in this place within the memory of its inhabitants.

In 1826, the Lord again revived his work here. Meetings for prayer and conference, even on the evenings of working days, were so fully attended, that it was necessary to remove from a private house to the School-house, and from thence to the

Meeting-house, for the accommodation of the people.

More than fifty were led to fix their hopes in the crucified Redeemer, and to rejoice in his salvation. Thirty-six were added to the Church by baptism, this year.

The affectionate warnings and invitations of young converts, whose hearts were glowing with ardent desires for the salvation of their fellow beings, often had the happiest effects on the irreligious.

Also, the ordinance of baptism was signally owned of God, as an instrument of awakening sinners in this revival. A number of the converts dated the commencement of their religious exercises from the impressions made upon their minds at the water side.

Br. Paul, of Boston, and several other ministering brethren, preached here, during this revival.

It was particularly pleasing to Br. Paul, to visit this place, where, more than twenty years before, he had

been present in a powerful revival, and where the Lord had crowned his labors with his benediction.

In this connexion it may not be uninteresting to subjoin a biographical remark on Br. Paul.

Thomas Paul was born in Exeter, N. H., 1773. He became hopefully pious at the age of sixteen, but did not commence preaching till he was twenty-eight. Though soon after his ordination, in 1805, he became Pastor of the Baptist Church of colored people in Boston, he did not confine his labors to the metropolis, but occasionally preached in various parts of New England, where his addresses attracted crowds of hearers, and his labors were greatly blessed.

In 1823, he was employed by the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society, as a missionary to the Republic of Hayti, in the West Indies. He was kindly received by President Boyer and other distinguished persons, who favored his preaching among the Haytiens.

In his various journeyings, he seemed to go in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. He was indeed no ordinary man, for without the advantages of a literary education, he became a distinguished preacher. In the manner of administering the ordinance of immersion, for propriety, solemnity and religious effect, he had no superior.

In 1815, having business which led him to Europe, he visited England, and was invited to preach in the Baptist Church of Dr. Rippon, and other distinguished places in London.

He continued about 25 years Pastor of the Church in Boston, where he was first settled. The gospel he had preached to others, supported and consoled him in his last sickness.

On the subject of his approaching change, he said, "I know that when the earthly house of my tabernacle is dissolved, I have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Near the close of his life, he exclaimed with emphasis, and in a voice

stronger than usual, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." He died April, 1831, in the 58th year of his age, and 30th of his ministry. Thus He, who is no respecter of persons, nor colors, honored and rewarded this humble servant of his divine Master.

In 1828, an Academy was erected in this place, by subscription of the Baptist Church and Society, to furnish a school for pious young men, who might here pursue studies preparatory to entering College, or the Theological Institution at Newton.

In 1829, Br. Davis received an invitation from the Baptist Church in Hartford, Conn. to become their Pastor. He had several years before, received a similar invitation from the

Baptist Church in Warren, Rhode Island, which he declined.

At this time, (1829,) he had an additional motive to accept this invitation from Hartford, as among some members of the Church here, considerable dissatisfaction had arisen, in consequence of the connection of their Pastor with the Institution of Free-masonry.

Br. Davis "withdrew" from the institution previous to his removal to Hartford.

As the doings of this Church with reference to Free-masonry, are recorded in a pamphlet, written by order of the Church, on this subject, it is only necessary to refer to that "Record."

Br. Davis preached his valedictory sermon in July, from Numbers xxvii. 16, 17. "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them

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in ; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd."

In this discourse Br. Davis remarked to his congregation, that he had been with them more than eleven years, during which time, "their Meeting-house had been removed to a more eligible site ; had been enlarged twice, and furnished with a chandelier, clock and bell. A literary Seminary had been founded in the centre of the village, patronized and prospered. One hundred and six persons had been received to the fellowship of the Church.— He had preached here 813 sermons ; solemnized 58 marriages, and officiated at the funeral solemnities of 51 persons."

Br. Davis became Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Hartford, Conn. where he continued, beloved and respected, zealously and usefully engaged till his death, in 1836.

Br. Davis was born in Boston, in 1797 ; was an orphan boy appren-

ticed to a trade in Worcester, Mass. where he was hopefully converted to God at the age of 16. He became a preacher at 17, was ordained at 19, married at 20, and settled with this Church at 21 years of age.

While here, he studied the Greek and Latin languages, and general literature, and received the College degree of Master of Arts; and subsequently, the title of Doctor of Divinity. He had naturally strong powers of mind, a very tenacious memory, a rapid conception, large self-possession, and a pretty ready utterance. His style of address was simple, pointed and laconic, well suited to interest a popular audience. He had an uncommon aptness in employing and applying Scripture in his discourses.

For instance; when he left the Society in Preston, where he had been laboring for three years, his valedictory sermon was from these words, "Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of *three*

years, I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears."

On one occasion, a hearer on leaving the meeting, remarked, "I thought our minister to-day was making a statement which he would find no Scripture to support, when he said, that such a promise, was '*firmer* than the pillars of heaven,' till to my surprise and admiration, he immediately quoted 'for though heaven and earth pass away, yet shall not my word pass away.'"

When Brother Davis commenced preaching, he had few if any books, beside the Bible, a Concordance and Watts' Psalms and Hymns; hence he was under an unusual necessity of drawing his sentiments, and even his language, from the sacred Oracles.

Besides his other studies of the Scriptures, he read the Bible through in course, *fifteen times*.

It has been well said, that no one can be justly termed an ignorant person, who is well acquainted with that single Book, the Bible. Apart

from its divine inspiration, the Bible is indeed a wonderful Book.

Its histories are of the greatest antiquity. It shows us the manners and customs of those, who lived thousands of years ago. It describes scenes in domestic life, and revolutions in empires and in nature, with all the simplicity, beauty and grandeur of truth and poetry. But especially it devolopes human character, and reveals the wonderous ways of God to man.

Sir William Jones, so distinguished for his erudition, who had resided in Europe and Asia, made himself acquainted with eastern and western science, and was able to read 28 different languages, wrote in the blank leaf of his Bible, "I have carefully and regularly perused these Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence, than can be collected from all other

books, in whatever language they may have been written."

"Hail, Holy Volume, whose blest page
Instructs our youth, supports our age;
Beams through the shades of death's dark night,
And brings eternity to light."

"Give me a BIBLE in my hand,
A heart to read and understand
The sure unerring word;
I'll urge no company to stay,
But sit alone from day to day,
Conversing with the Lord."

MINISTRY OF BR. WARNE.

After the dismission of Br. Davis, the Church invited Br. Joseph A. Warne, to become their Pastor. He accepted the invitation, and took up his residence with us in Oct. 1829.

May, 1830, one of our sisters* being about to proceed to a missionary station among the Western Indians, the Church gave her a letter of recommendation to the "followers of our Lord, wherever her lot might be

* Miss Mary Walton, (now Mrs. Blanchard.)

cast." She is now in the country of the Delaware Indians, near the Missouri River, and near the western boundary of Missouri State. A number of this tribe have been baptized on a profession of their faith in Christ. Here is a school for instructing native children, and near this, a printing press, where books are printed in the Delaware and other Indian languages.

It is highly desirable, that the aborigines of this land, who, we must allow, have repeatedly been oppressed and defrauded by the whites, should be made acquainted with the gospel of peace and salvation; and we rejoice to add to the number of laborers in the missionary field among these sons of the forest.

Near a century ago, the Moravians commenced a mission among the Delawares, the fathers of this western tribe, who resided about the Delaware River, in Pennsylvania. Numbers of these and other Indians became hopeful converts to Christianity

in the great revivals of that period. The Christian Indians of the Delaware tribe, instructed and somewhat civilized by the Moravians, remained peaceable and friendly on our frontiers, in the French war, and the war of the revolution.

During the revolution, a war party of the Wyandots, (the ancestors of the Delawares,) on their way to join the British, stopped at the settlement of the Christian Delawares, on the Muskingum River. Their chief was so struck with the peaceable and virtuous conduct of these converted Indians, that he addressed them in these words,

"Cousins, continue always as you now are. Join in no disputes, no wars. You will fare well—the Great Spirit will protect you."

The Christian Indians replied, "In the Book which our teachers have, God commands in one place, 'thou shalt not kill'—in another, 'love your enemies, and pray for them.'" The old chief was so influenced by the

conduct and address of these Christian Indians, that he returned to his home without fighting the Americans, though he said the British had threatened him with punishment if he did not.

The Christian Indians called the place of their settlement, on the Susquehannah River, *Friedenshutten*,—that is, "tents of peace."

When a party of savage Indians surrounded the house of Isaac Glickhican, an eminent Christian Indian, with a design to destroy him, he addressed them in this language,

"Friends, by your manouvres, I conclude you are come for me; if so, why do you hesitate; you seem to fear old Glickhican. Ah! there was a time when I would have scorned to submit to such cowardly slaves. But I am no more Glickhican, (i. e. *sight on a gun barrel)*—I am Isaac, a believer in the true God, and for his sake I will suffer any thing, even death."

Thus we see the influence of the blessed gospel on the fierce savages

of the wilderness, and hence we have a motive to labor to bring these wild warriors to enlist under the banner of the Prince of Peace.

INTERIM.

In October, 1830, Br. Joseph A. Warne requested a dismission from his pastoral connexion with this Church, which request was granted. He afterwards became Pastor of the Baptist Church in Brookline, Mass. and successively of a Baptist Church in Providence and in Philadelphia.

Br. Warne was a native of England, where he studied for the ministry. He was for several years Pastor of a Baptist Church, and an Instructer of Theological students in North Carolina. He was selected to edit the Baptist edition of the "Comprehensive Commentary on the Bible." He was esteemed an "able minister of the New Testament."

At the commencement of the year 1831, sister Naomi Badger died, aged

76 years. She was one of the sixty-five members who first formed this Church. Through life she was distinguished for her pious, circumspect and consistent Christian deportment.

To a zealous young preacher she once said, "If you have ever done any *good*, take great heed that you do not afterwards do more *hurt* than all the good you have done." A remark worthy to be long remembered by every professor of religion, whether clergyman or layman.

In August, 1831, the Church appointed a day of fasting and prayer, voted to hold a series of meetings for three or four days, and gave a general invitation to ministering brethren and friends to meet with them.

Some of the brethren who addressed these meetings, were Brs. Briggs, of Malden; Barnaby, of Danvers; Jackson, of Charlestown, and Warne, of Brookline.

These meetings appeared to be blest to the religious awakening of a goodly number of persons. The

Church was then destitute of a Pastor; but was supplied with preaching by Br. John Pratt, who was then Preceptor of the Academy in this place. Br. Pratt baptized thirty-one persons in the autumn of this year, and nine more were baptized previous to the next January, making an addition of forty to the Church, as the fruits of this revival. Some of these were children from twelve to fifteen years of age.*

This was among the first instances of such a series of meetings being held by our denomination in this region. Different estimates have been formed of the comparative advantages of such meetings. Probably, one of the strongest natural causes why such meetings, at least the *first* time they are held in a place, should

* This year was eminently distinguished for the effusions of the Divine Spirit. It was estimated that during the spring and summer of this year, in different parts of our land, there were not less than fifty thousand converted to God.

awaken extraordinary attention to the subject of religion is, their *continuous* character.

Very often, only temporary impressions of a religious nature are made on the minds of people, because their secular business, their "farms and merchandise," the "cares of the world, and the lust of other things," so quickly divert that attention, which began to be bestowed upon the momentous concerns of the soul, and effectually "choke the word" which has been sown in their minds, and render it unfruitful.

A series of meetings has repeatedly arrested and fixed the attention of persons who had previously floated down the current of time, as mere spectators of the great things that belong to the kingdom of God.

"The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light," and partly because they are *men of expedients*.

It is proper for saints, in things lawful, to become "all things to all men," to save their souls.

An extraordinary degree of worldly mindedness, apathy and inattention to religion, may sometimes justify extraordinany measures to break this fatal charm of the adversary of souls.

But the Church should never forget that all pure religion has its seat, not in the varying passions of the mind, but in the permanent affections of the heart; that the understanding must be informed as well as the fears excited, "they being most firmly good, who best know why," and they should be cautious not to encourage persons to hope they are converted on insufficient evidence, lest such in "time of temptation should fall away."

In all these things, heavenly "wisdom is profitable to direct."

Without being hasty in denouncing or commending what may seem "new measures," it is best to depend chiefly on the regular, faithful and affectionate dispensation of the word of truth, joined with a well ordered

life, and godly conversation in professors, for the regenerating effects of the gospel; for it pleases God "by the foolishness of preaching, (though not by *foolish preaching,*) to save them that believe." Therefore, "in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening, withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

In the summer of the year 1832, the Church, in view of the cholera, which had proceeded from the east to this continent, appointed a day of humiliation and prayer, to supplicate the Father of mercies to preserve our land from this desolating pestilence.

New England in general, was graciously preserved from this destroying angel, which is estimated to have swept away on the eastern continent, *fifty millions* of our race, in the space of fifteen years.

MINISTRY OF BR. HUCKENS.

This year, (1832,) Brother James Huckens, a young man from Brown University, Providence, was invited to become Pastor of this Church.

He accepted the invitation, and in September of this year, a Council was convened for the purpose of ordaining him to the work of the gospel ministry, and to the pastoral charge of this Church.

Professor Elton, of Brown University, preached the sermon on the occasion.

INTERIM.

In 1833, Br. Huckens requested a dismission; on receiving which, he became Pastor of a Baptist Church formed in Andover, in 1832.

A considerable number of the members of this Church in Andover, originally joined the Baptist Church in South Reading.

This year, (1833,) also, a number of our members were dismissed, to form a Baptist Church in the west part of Reading.

In 1833, having had several cases of intemperance in members of the Church, it was thought, that a person in health could not conscientiously pray, "Lead me not into temptation," who was in the habit of using ardent spirit as a beverage.

The Church, considering it their duty as far as possible to render their body in the best sense a *Temperance Society,* passed the following resolution, viz:

"*Resolved,* That it is contrary to the sentiments and wishes of this Church to receive to church membership, any persons who are in the usual habit of taking ardent spirit as a drink."

The Lord seemed to smile on this temperance act of the Church, for they have since had few or no cases of intemperance among their causes of discipline.

In 1834, the Church was supplied with preaching chiefly by students from the Theological Institution at Newton.

MINISTRY OF BR. SAWYER.

In the spring of 1835, Br. Isaac Sawyer, Jr. from Jay, N. Y. became Pastor of the Church.

Near the close of the year 1835, our house of worship was burnt, having taken fire from the stove pipe. The Sabbath School Library and Clock were saved from the flames.

The following year, a new house was erected, forty-eight by sixty-eight feet, with a conference hall in the basement story.

Near the commencement of the year 1836, the firm faith, fervid devotion, tranquil and happy death of a brother of this Church,* had a convincing and awakening influence on the minds of some young persons who visited him in his last sickness, and who were afterwards hopeful converts to the religion of Christ.

This amiable brother, especially in his last years, was distinguished for his meek and humble deport-

*Br. Oliver Burnham.

ment, his placid and sweetly devout spirit. His disease was pulmonary consumption. His approach to the tomb was like the gently coming shades of evening.

The very tones of his devotional lips were like the vesper music, over the twilight waters. His spirit, his practice, and his end are most justly described in the following beautiful lines:

"I love to steal awhile away
From ev'ry cumb'ring care,
And spend the hours of setting day,
In humble, grateful prayer.

"I love in solitude to shed
The penitential tear,
And all his promises to plead
Where none but God can hear.

"I love to think on mercies past,
And future good implore,
And all my sins and sorrows cast
On Him whom I adore.

"I love by faith to take a view
Of brighter scenes in heav'n;
Such prospects oft my strength renew,
While here by tempests driv'n.

"Thus, when life's toilsome day is o'er,
May its departing ray
Be calm as this impressive hour,
And lead to endless day."

The spring of this year was distinguished by a special attention to religion. Some appeared to be subjects of renewing grace, whose lives had been strikingly foreign to any thing of a religious character.

On one occasion, in a conference meeting at a private house, it was remarked, that one week before, people would as soon have thought of hearing a religious meeting appointed in the grave yard, as at that house.

Well saith the apostle, "You hath he quickened, (made alive,) who were dead in trespasses and sins."

The Lord blessed the ministry of his word, by Br. Sawyer.

After the commencement of the good work, there was ardent pleading for its *continuance.*

Brethren seemed to feel and pray as the disciples at Emmaus, who

would constrain the risen Saviour to tarry with them, saying, "abide with us."

In this revival it was remarkable, that most of the subjects of the work were *heads of families.*

There seems to be an additional blessing in such becoming pious, as their influence over their households may be of unspeakable advantage.

While by the pernicious influence of vicious parents, the Lord visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generations, he shows mercies unto thousands of generations of them that love him and keep his commandments.

This year 25 persons were added to the Church. The meetings were frequent and delightful.

Agreeably to Scripture language, the saints here "sat together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

The feelings of the young convert were well described in the words of the poet,

O how happy are they
Who their Saviour obey,
And have laid up their treasure above!
Tongue can never express
The sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul in its earliest love!

Jesus all the day long
Was my joy and my song;
O that all his salvation might see!
He hath lov'd me, I cried,
He hath suffer'd and died
To redeem such a rebel as me.

And when at the baptismal waters, by these lines,

Hither we come, our dearest Lord,
Obedient to thy sacred word;
'Tis thou hast call'd our hearts to flee,
From sense and sin, and *follow thee.*

Here rang'd along the water's side,
Where gently rolls the silent tide;
O, what on earth can sweeter be,
Than thus to come and *follow thee.*

Thou wast immers'd beneath the wave,
The emblem of thy future grave;
And while the way so plain we see,
What can we do but *follow thee.*

While others walk the downward road,
That onward leads to death's abode;
Adored be thy grace, that we
May take our cross and *follow thee.*

Such dispositions and sentiments seem to resemble those possessed by happy spirits in heaven, as described in Scripture.

These, "follow the Lamb whithsoever he goeth." Their song is, "Worthy the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

"Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

We are aware, that some persons have a strong prejudice against what are styled "*revivals of religion.*"—With such a phrase, they associate only an idea of unreasonable excitement, of superstition and fanaticism.

That persons who *read*, and profess to *believe* their *Bibles*, should so think, is not a little surprising.

Most certainly the Scriptures speak of the Lord's *reviving* his work, of the *outpouring* of his *Spirit*, of a rain of righteousness, of *times of refreshing* from the presence of the Lord.

And they inform us that, anciently, at such times people were distressed about their sins, they were "pricked in their heart," they inquired with great anxiety, "What must I do to be saved." They "gladly received" the word of the Lord, which answers this question; they turned to the Lord "with purposeof heart;" they "were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins."

Now all this is neither more nor less, than what, in modern times, we mean by a "*revival of religion;*" and a person is neither a fool nor an enthusiast, because he aids in such a work, or is the subject of it.

If children, (as many evidently now do,) continue to grow up without the supreme love of God in their hearts, (as Christ said to his hearers on one occasion, "I know you, that ye have not the *love of God in you,*") and live without obeying Christ's injunctions, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" which enjoins them to make religion

the great, the supreme business of their lives, then there will continue to be occasion for *revivals of religion;* times when men "consider their ways," "repent of their sins," and "turn to the Lord," through the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit.

If any person can be *ridiculed* or *laughed* out of his belief, *(argued* out of it, he never can be,) in the reality and necessity of such revivals of religion, he is much more to be pitied for his weakness and depravity, than commended for his knowledge of the Bible, or his understandng of the legitimate effects of Christianity.

In 1835, the Church voted to observe a day of humiliation and prayer for our national sins, in reference to slavery, and that God would dispose the hearts of those who hold their fellow men in bondage, to liberate them.

On the evening of the last Monday in each month, there was subse-

quently a special prayer meeting for this object. The Salem Baptist Association, of which this Church is a member, has since recommended to the Churches composing that body, the observance of the "monthly concert of prayer for the abolition of slavery."

In 1837, the Church, further considering the great injustice done to slaves, who are deprived of their natural rights; their family and conjugal ties often broken, in violation of the laws of God, and they, in many instances, forbidden to learn to read those Scriptures which are "able to make them wise unto salvation," felt it their duty to express their disfellowship of such conduct in professors of our denomination.

Particularly after learning, that the *Savannah River Baptist Association* of ministers,* gave their approval

* On this subject the above Association uses this reasoning: "Such separation among persons situated as our slaves are, is *civilly* a separation by *death; the slaves are not free*

of licensing slaves, whose husbands or wives were sold into servitude, and separated from them, to marry *others;* in direct derogation of that Scripture which forbids man to put asunder "what God hath joined together."

The Church voted their disapprobation of such doings, and that they could not conscientiously extend to such professors the hand of fellowship, nor invite them to commune with us at the sacred table of our Lord.

It is indeed amazing, that the advocates of our Declaration of Independence, which asserts the "self-evident truth," that among the "unalienable rights" of man, are those

agents (!!) and a dissolution by death is not more entirely without their consent, and beyond their control, than by such separation."

How must the great Judge of all, who is "no respecter of persons," view a system which gives such tyranical power to one man, and so effectually blots out the rights, and even the *free agency* of another man?

of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," should be found trafficking in such merchandise as *human flesh and bones*, the living "*image of God*," the "*souls of men* ! !*

Christ says, "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

The apostle classes "men-stealers" with "man-slayers, whore-mongers and murderers." With such Scriptures, no ingenuity, or sophistry of reasoning, can reconcile the conduct of those, who either kidnapped in Africa, the parents of the present slaves in our land, or have retained their descendants in bondage.

If the receiver of stolen goods be alike culpable with the purloiner, even a child can see the position of such slave-holders by inheritance.

To tell a man, "because my parents have defrauded your parents of their liberty and their wages, there-

* See Revelation, xviii. 13.

fore I shall defraud you in the same manner," is an argument, as absurd, as it is insulting.

What a voice is that which thunders in the ears of the rich oppressor: "Weep and howl! Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

President Jefferson, though bred among bondmen, and amid the prejudices and excuses of slave-holders, was so impressed with the sin of slavery, that he says, in reference to a struggle of the slaves for their freedom, "the Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest." "Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever."

"Who shall avenge the slave?" I stood and cried;
"The Earth, the Earth!" the echoing sea replied.
I turned me to the ocean, but each wave
Declined to be the avenger of the slave.
"Who shall avenge the slave?" my species cry,
"The winds, the floods, the lightning of the sky."
I turned to these—from them one echo ran—
"The right avenger of the slave, is man."
Man was my fellow; in his sight I stood,
Wept, and besought him by the voice of blood:
Sternly he looked, as proud on earth he trod,
Then said, "the avenger of the slave is GOD!"
I looked in prayer towards heaven—awhile 'twas still,
And then methought GOD's voice replied, "*I will.*"

About the commencement of the year 1838, there was a more than common attention to religion, particularly among the members of the Sabbath School; a number of whom, from twelve to fifteen years of age, became hopeful subjects of renewing grace, were baptized and added to the Church in the spring of this year.

It was particularly interesting and impressive, to hear the songs of Zion and "Hosanna to the Son of David," from such young persons.

May the good and great Shepherd feed and preserve these lambs of the flock.

INTERIM.

In the spring of 1838, Br. Sawyer requested a dismission from this people, which was granted, and he became Pastor of the Baptist Church in Deerfield, N. H.

Previous to this, there had been some variety of opinion in the Church as to the expediency of Br. Sawyer's dissolving his pastoral relation with the Church.

And here it may not be improper to remark, in the history of this Church, that the principal cases of uneasiness that have occurred, have originated in diversity of judgment on certain questions, where there was no palpable "thus saith the Lord," to decide the point.

It is manifest that in such cases, honest minds may arrive at different conclusions. On such questions the

Scriptures especially enjoin brethren to "forbear one another in love."

They ought to be ready to discount something from their own infallibility of judgment, in order to meet others who vary somewhat from them in opinion.

Such a course of forbearance and kind reasoning together, has the best tendency ultimately to promote unanimity of feeling, sentiment and action.

It is characteristic of the true friends of the Church, to feel as the true mother of the child, on which Solomon was ready to pronounce sentence of division; they will sooner relinquish some of their personal rights, than to see the daughter of Sion cut asunder.

Br. Sawyer was a young man, who had been preaching about four years when he came to this place.

He embraced the views of Mr. William Miller, of New York, respecting the speedy second coming

of Christ; the close of this dispensation, and the dissolution of our globe.

He was a speaker very little confined to scholastic rules, either in the composition or delivery of his discourses.

His style of address, often of bold and original conceptions and expressions, was frequently no less startling and terrific, than earnest and pathetic.

An extensive revival of religion has attended his preaching among the people of his charge at Deerfield, the present year, (1840.)

MINISTRY OF BR. MILLER.

Immediately after the dismission of Br. Sawyer, the Church invited Br. Charles Miller to become their Pastor. He accepted their invitation. But his health suddenly failing, he was unable to enter on his pastoral labors, though he remained

with us more than six months, hoping to regain his health. Br. Miller was a native of Scotland.

INTERIM.

During most of the years 1838 and 1839, the Church was supplied with preaching by students from the Theological Institution at Newton.

MINISTRY OF BR. COLE.

In the spring of 1840, Br. L. B. Cole, who had been preaching several weeks among us, to the quickening of professors, and the awakening of a number of unregenerate persons, accepted the invitation of the Church, to become their Pastor.

In May of this year, the Church appointed a day for special devotional exercises and supplications, for the continued outpouring of the Spirit; previous to which, a volunteer committee agreed to visit each

member of the Church, and inquire into their spiritual interests, and feelings with reference to the work of the Lord among us, and the appointment of this day for humiliation, prayer and praise, and report their doings on said day, which was accordingly done, and the day was spent with interest and profit.

Members of the Church seemed spontaneously to "confess their faults one to another, and to pray one for another." Numbers wept together, while others rejoiced with those that did rejoice, thanked God, and took courage.

The exercises on a part of the day were public, and well attended.—Good appeared to result from this day's services.

During the spring and summer of this year, twenty-two persons were baptized by Br. Cole, and added to the Church.

This year has been distinguished for revivals of religion in various

parts of our land, as was this year, one century since.

About one century ago, there were remarkable revivals of religion in Germany, Netherlands, England, Wales, Scotland, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and especially in New England.

In 1744, some pious persons in Europe agreed to observe the first Tuesday in each of the four seasons of the year, for a special concert of prayer, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the regeneration of unconverted persons; or a "concert of prayer, that our Lord's kingdom may come, joined with praises."

They sent a "memorial" across the Atlantic to this country, inviting all, without distinction of "denomination or party," who "have at heart the interest of vital Christianity, and the power of godliness," to unite with them in this concert. Since then, a *monthly* concert for this important object, has been observed in all the grand divisions of the earth.

It is remarkable, that the first three petitions in the prayer, which Christ taught his disciples, are for the same object.

This shows the propriety and importance of statedly and even *daily* (as the term *daily* in our Lord's prayer suggests its daily use,) making requests to God, that his kingdom may come on earth.

Before all other interests, even our necessary food and clothing, Christ enjoins "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

In answer to the fervent prayers of those pious souls, who are now in heaven, what blessings have descended during the past century.

The Scriptures have been translated into most of the known languages of man; missionaries have visited most heathen countries, and the flying angel, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, has spread his wings over almost every land.

Glory to God in the highest!

"Father of mercies, speed the promised hour,
'Thy kingdom come' with all restoring power;
Peace, virtue, knowledge, spread from pole to pole,
As round the world the ocean-waters roll."

Let it never be imagined that the devout saint is a mere rhapsodist; he is the most reasonable—the only reasonable man in the world. Like the prodigal in the gospel, he has "come to himself."

What reflecting man does not know, that by nature he sees not the "beauties of holiness,"—does not relish the spiritual worship of God, does not love to enter his closet and there pray to that God who seeth in secret, does not "delight in the law of God"; that he cannot in honesty say with the devout Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God?"

Now the Holy Spirit is indispensible to convert men to the supreme

and constant love of God; to "create a clean heart within them," and to sanctify their affections with that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

For this spirit of grace we are to continue and increase our supplications.

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers;
Come, shed abroad a Saviour's love,
And that shall kindle ours."

CONCLUSION.

In remembering "all the way which the Lord our God has led us these forty years," we are impressed with the force and value of Christ's promise,—"upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Anciently, at the gates of a city, its rulers held their counsels, and formed their plans of assault and conquest.

Thus this language of Christ, strongly implies the designs and efforts of evil angels and their emmissaries, to destroy the peace, the good influence, and the souls of the members of his Church.

Even those who are truly born again of the Spirit, are in the present state, so far from being wholly purified from all wrong propensities, and so far from being perfect in knowl-

edge, that they are often liable to be influenced by improper passions and prejudices, and fall into various errors of judgment.

Of these defects the great "Accuser of our brethren" endeavors to make the most mischief, of which his deep understanding of human character, and his long experience in the wiles of seduction, falsehood, division and slander, enable him to do.

Were it not that Christianity is the cause of Him, whose wisdom is unsearchable, and whose arm is omnipotent, well might we despair of the continuance of the Church; well might we expect, that like other associations, "counsels and works of men," it would soon come to nought.

But how precious is the promise of Him, who assures us, that the gates of hell, however artfully or furiously they may assail his Church, "shall not *prevail* against it."

This is all our hope and all our confidence.

At its constitution in 1804, this Church contained sixty-five members.

During the pastorage of Elder Nelson, twenty-five persons were added.

In the interim between the ministry of Elder Nelson and that of Br. Davis, eighteen persons were added.

During the ministry of Br. Davis, one hundred and six persons were added.

Since the dismission of Br. Davis, one hundred and sixty persons have been added; making a total of three hundred and seventy-four members.

And this Church, which has dismissed of its members to form three other Churches, namely, a Baptist Church in North Reading, a Baptist Church in West Reading, and a Baptist Church in Andover, now contains two hundred and six members.

In reviewing the history of this Church, we see the kind providence of the Lord toward it.

Surely we may erect our "Ebenezer," and say, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us." How different are the circumstances of our denomination *now*, from what they were, when the first individuals of our sentiments were here baptized, forty-six years ago.

Then, there were but *six* Churches of our denomination within twenty miles of this place. Now, within that distance, there are about forty Churches, numbering nearly ten thousand members.

Then, there were not thirty Baptist Associations in the United States. Now, there are more than four hundred, with more than four thousand ordained ministers. And this people, which was then "a sect every where spoken against," embraces more members in its Churches, than any other denomination in our land, amounting to more than half a million.

Verily what hath God wrought! "He hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

And here it seems pertinent to notice, that two* of the three, who were the first persons known to have been buried with Christ by baptism, in this town, are still living, and officers in this Church.

The Lord has thus spared them to favour their younger brethren with their counsels and their prayers. Like the "perfect man" and "the upright," may their "end be peace."

In view of the great privileges which we as a Church have so long enjoyed of hearing the word of life dispensed by various servants of the Lord, of receiving the sacred ordinances of the Gospel, of meeting unmolested, to converse about the things of God's kingdom and offer our prayers for Zion,

Surely we ought to be very grateful.

The Lord has not dealt so with every people, and to us emphatical-

* Dea. Jacob Eaton, and Dea. David Smith.

ly comes the injunction,—"Praise ye the Lord."

We ought to possess a high degree of holiness of heart and life; strong faith and ardent devotion to the cause of Zion.

May the Lord forgive our past short comings in duty, and all the errors we may have committed in attending to the rules of his house; unite us all "as the heart of one man" to love, fear and serve him,—continue this "Candlestick" in "its place,"—and glorify his great name in "the house of his glory."

"Now, unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

Unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

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